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SPEECH

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OF

HON. M. F. CONWAY,
OF KANSAS,

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 27, 1863.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I had the honor to submit to this House, several weeks ago, a series of resolutions, asserting, among other things, that it was inexpedient to wage this war for the purpose of restoring the Union; that the restoration of the Union as it existed prior to the rebellion, would be a greater calamity than the rebellion itself; that the seceded States could not be subdued but by being assailed upon principles of ordinary warfare as between separate nations; and that it was a matter for serious reflection whether the rightful authority of the nation could be re-established without a change in the *personnel* of the Executive Department. Members of the House, on both sides, were exceedingly swift to testify their opposition to such views, and my resolutions were laid on the table by a vote of 132 to 1.

I may here remark that these propositions were not designed to be immediately put to a vote of the House. I requested and expected them to be placed with similar resolutions offered by other gentlemen, in order that they might come up at the proper time for discussion. I made no question of the justice of the House, nor of its courtesy. If my opinions were peculiarly my own, this only rendered it the more necessary that I should explain them before action was taken. Nevertheless, I make no complaint. The House is the best judge of what most befits it in such a case. I have only to observe and regulate my own conduct, and leave others to look out for their's. But it may not be amiss to remember that one man, with the Almighty on his side, is in a majority; and though unanimously voted down by Houses of Representatives never so often, comes up each time again and again with renewed power, until finally he rises triumphant over all opposition.

My faith is not shaken in the slightest degree by the disapprobation of this House, nor am I deterred from an elaborate repetition of my views.

Sir, in my judgment, this war has not been conducted with any purpose of securing triumph to the national arms, or the subjugation of the public enemy. At no stage of its progress has the Executive sought the conquest of the South.

His exclusive aim has been to restore the constitutional relations of the people of the seceded States to the Government of the Union; and this he has endeavored to accomplish rather by holding back than marching forward the armies of the Republic into the enemy's country and putting him down.

The President has not seemed to regard himself authorized to make war on the slaveholders, if, by other methods, he could induce them to return to their allegiance. He has, therefore, sought to exhaust every other agency before showing even a disposition to resort to vigorous action in the field.

Even for his late proclamation of emancipation he seeks justification on the exclusive ground of its absolute necessity to the end of restoring the Union.

The country has recently been shocked by a disclosure of the fact that the visit of M. MERCIER, the French minister, to Richmond, last summer, supposed at that time to have reference to tobacco, was really an embassy from the Federal Government, designed to bring about a resumption of the Union by the slaveholders. M. MERCIER, in writing to his Government on the subject, under date of 13th April, 1862, says that he was authorized by our Secretary of State to tell the slaveholders, that, in his opinion, the North was animated by no sentiment of vengeance, and that, for himself, he should with pleasure find himself again in the Senate in the presence of those whom the South thought it fit to send thither."

To this policy I have been strenuously opposed from the commencement of this war. I have regarded it as utterly unsound in principle, and calculated to produce consequences the most disastrous.

I have not regarded the seceded States, during the period of civil war, as having any constitutional relations whatever; nor have I regarded the leniency and procrastination of the Executive as calculated to have any other effect than defeat to us and ultimate triumph to them.

Sir, I am not in favor of restoring the constitutional relations of the slaveholders to the Union, nor of the war to that end. On the contrary, I am utterly and forever opposed to both. I am in favor of the Union as it exists to-day. I am in favor of recognising the loyal States as the American nation, based as they are on the principle of freedom for all, without distinction of race, color, or condition. I believe it to be the manifest destiny of the American nation to ultimately control the American continent on this principle.

I conceive, therefore, that the true object of this war is to revolutionize the national Government by resolving the North into the nation, and the South into a distinct public body, leaving us in a position to pursue the latter as a separate State. I believe that the direction of the war to any other end is a perversion of it, calculated to subvert the very object it was designed to effect.

To my apprehension, this war is a manifestation of northern power, impelled by natural forces, seeking embodiment in a national form, and aspiring to the dominion of this continent. It is the result of an idea, and of northern growth and character. It seeks to create anew. "North" and "South" are primarily geographical terms, but with us they are likewise political words, denoting political systems developed through the operation of our Federal Constitution, and founded on different social organizations. Until recently, the North had never possessed any other than a merely subordinate political existence. It consisted of fifteen States, with a population of twenty millions—all the elements of a ruling nationality—a soil and climate adapted to the production of boundless wealth—all the refinements of a high civilization in abundant measure—schools, colleges, churches, sciences, literature, art—besides immense resources and capacities for war. Nevertheless, it had no distinctive political character. It was more southern than northern; nay, it was altogether southern. The idea of the South was slavery, and the existence of slavery required it to subordinate all parts of the nation to its own will and purpose. And so the North was overruled and assimilated by the South.

But this fact eventually precipitated a revolution. It furnished the North with the motive, the justification, and the instrumentality of self-development.

National organization proceeds on an idea which forms the basis of a nation and determines its character. Common justice and self-defence are usually the simple ends of government; but a loftier impulse will likewise produce its appropriate organ. A great people, impelled by a strong, deep, and abiding purpose, will effect an external form to correspond therewith in spite of all impediments.

Freedom for the American continent became the idea of the North—a grand, inspiring idea, and utterly incompatible with the existence of the South as a political system. It became the basis of a great party, and soon expanded into a vast movement. It went on conquering and to conquer.

This necessitated a revolution and a new order. This involved war as an instrument of revolution and regeneration.

The honorable member from Ohio [Mr. VALLANDIGHAM] ascribes to this movement a Puritanic origin. He is mistaken. The Puritan may have done many good things, and some bad ones; but it is highly unjust to give him the credit of this. Massachusetts, it is true, has taken the lead of late years in anti-slavery agitation, and has done much—altogether more than any other State. I enter into no discussion with the gentleman as to the merits of the Pilgrim fathers. That is not in the way of my purpose. But whatever the settlers of New England may have done or left undone to justify the gentleman's vituperation, they have certainly not failed to do that which entitles them to honor and respect from all mankind, to wit: transmit to their posterity an abiding love of justice, and eternal hostility to any form of tyranny.

But, sir, I claim for this idea of continental freedom a southern origin. Virginia was its birth-place; Thomas Jefferson its author. In the days of Jefferson, the Old Dominion was the foremost State in America, and entitled to take the lead in shaping the destinies of the continent. It was Jefferson who first charged it as a crime upon the British king, his attempt to fasten slavery on the virgin soil of the New World. It was Jefferson who proclaimed, with the rest, through the immortal Declaration of Independence, the inalienable rights of human nature. It was Jefferson and Virginia who gave up the vast territory of the Northwest, and, under the glorious ordinance of 1787, dedicated it to freedom forever.

Sir, this was the system of the revolutionary fathers of the South; and it will not do for gentlemen to attempt to stigmatize it by referring it to any narrow or sectarian source.

The work of the North to-day is to organize the nation on the identical principle of the Jeffersonian ordinance of 1787, to the end of ultimately bringing the whole continent under its beneficent sway.

The first step, therefore, which should have been taken in the progress of the war, was to acknowledge a revolution, to recognize the South in its new character, to assume the North to be exclusively the nation, and then to pursue the war for conquest, or not pursue it at all, as might have seemed most expedient and proper for the time being.

But, unfortunately, those to whom the conduct of this great transition was committed, have not seemed to comprehend their work. They have disowned the revolution. They have used the war as far as possible to defeat it, and restore the old system.

It is evident to me that this policy will prove disastrous. The war in the hands of those now in authority has an inevitable tendency to defeat the North, to remand it back to its former subserviency to the South. Its manifest effect is to produce a reaction through which a new party will come into power, pledged not to northern nationality, but to the old Union at any price. The war seems to be supported not only by the Opposition, but also by the Administration, for the most part, with reference to this result.

In this view I may be mistaken. I shall rejoice if my error be demonstrated by events. But I shall endeavor, in this speech, to set forth the reasons for the faith that is in me. In the event that I am correct, however, I say to gentlemen of the Republican party, that they will be compelled to change their base of operations. Public opinion will demand a new programme. I am now in a minority of *one* in this House; but after the 4th of March next,

unless my judgment be sadly at fault, I shall stand with the great body of the people of the North, insisting upon a cessation of hostilities.

The slaveholders inhabit the country extending south from Mason and Dixon's line to the Rio Grande, and from the Atlantic ocean west to the Rocky mountains. This area is divided into fifteen parts, and the inhabitants of each are organized into a political body called "a State," making in all fifteen "States." Left to themselves, these "States" have power simply within their own limits, and over their own resources. But in the Union they are invested with power enough to govern the whole country from the Rio Grande to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The Constitution is the instrument in which the conditions of the Union are laid down; and the Constitution provides that these "States" shall each have two votes in the national Senate, a certain number of votes in the national House of Representatives, and votes in the choice of President equal to their combined votes in the Senate and House.

Accordingly, something like five thousand slaveholders, more or less, living on a few acres of land near the mouth of the Delaware river, organized into and denominated the "State of Delaware," are entitled to one vote in the House, two votes in the Senate, and three in the electoral college. About forty thousand on the Chesapeake Bay, organized into the "State of Maryland," are entitled to six votes in the House, two in the Senate, and eight in the electoral college. Those organized as "Virginia" are entitled to thirteen in the House, two in the Senate, and fifteen in the electoral college; those as "North Carolina," eight in the House, two in the Senate, ten in the electoral college; as "South Carolina," six in the House, two in the Senate, eight in the electoral college; as "Georgia," eight in the House, two in the Senate, ten in the electoral college; as "Florida," one in the House, two in the Senate, three in the electoral college; as "Alabama," seven in the House, two in the Senate, nine in the electoral college; as "Mississippi," five in the House, two in the Senate, seven in the electoral college; as "Louisiana," four in the House, two in the Senate, six in the electoral college; as "Texas," two in the House, two in the Senate, four in the electoral college; as "Arkansas," two in the House, two in the Senate, four in the electoral college; as "Tennessee," ten in the House, two in the Senate, twelve in the electoral college; as "Kentucky," ten in the House, two in the Senate, twelve in the electoral college; as "Missouri," seven in the House, two in the Senate, nine in the electoral college.

Now, these votes rolled up into one solid body, constitute the slave power. They are the elements of that power. They exhibit slavery in its character of a political force; and, as Wendell Phillips says, have kept New York and Boston mortgaged to secure title to field-hands in South Carolina. They have elected our Presidents, controlled our legislation, inspired our whole system. Through this voting power, slavery has assimilated the nation; developed it into its own form and substance; made it to obey its impulse and represent its character.

This is the old Union. This is what the war is to restore. It is to reinvest the slaveholders with power to dominate the nation under the forms of a common Government. If the Constitution had never been adopted by the slaveholders, this power would never have existed. Since they have repudiated it, it has ceased to exist. And unless we compel them to accept it again, the slave power is dead and gone forever in America.

I cannot conscientiously give my support to a policy that proposes to enforce such a resumption. On the contrary, I insist that that policy shall be abandoned, and future action proceed upon the fact of the independent nationality of the North in the Union.

But the honorable gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. MAYNARD] says that this

is a proposition to dissolve the Union. In this the honorable gentleman will permit me to say that he does not fairly represent the proposition.

It may not be out of place to say that, notwithstanding my hostility to the slave power, I am not now, nor have I ever been, a disunionist. It is true, I have never allowed myself to indulge in that superstitious idolatry of the Union so prevalent among simple but honest people, nor that political cant about the Union so prevalent among dishonest ones. I have simply regarded it as a form of Government, to be valued in proportion to its merits as an instrument of national prosperity and power.

In my opinion the Union, at the time of its formation, was well adapted to the condition of the country, and was a wise and noble work. The advancement of the several States, however, in population, pursuits, resources and power—the multiplication of States—the rise of special interests—the growth and spread of slavery—and the profound sectional antagonism which sprang up between the North and South, wrought an immense change—a change not foreseen by the founders of the Union—rendering their system far less beneficial than in the earlier years of its existence. Nevertheless, as the lawfully existing form of national organization, I ever rendered it due allegiance. When the southern rebellion arose and menaced the Union, I stood, in perfect faith, with the Union and against the rebellion. My record as a member of this House will so attest. In August, 1861, I voted to place at the disposal of the Executive five hundred thousand men and five hundred million dollars, to make the Union good against insurrection.

But the honorable gentleman, I imagine, belongs to that numerous but steadily decreasing class who think, or profess to think, that the old Union is still in existence—a class of persons who continually suggest the remark made of the Bourbons, that they “never learned anything or forgot anything.”

Sir, it would be absurd for any one to suppose that the former or the existing Union, or any description of government ever known among men, could be dissolved by any action proceeding from within itself. The honorable member from Ohio, [Mr. Cox,] in his able speech of December 12, truly said that there was no power in any department of this Government to effect a separation of the States. The Government of the Union, like all well-regulated systems, provides for its own amendment, but in no manner whatever contemplates its own destruction. The charge of the gentleman from Tennessee implies that either he or I supposes that the Union might be dissolved by a resolution of this House. I will not intimate such a reflection upon his good sense, and can only repel any such upon mine.

Sir, the single power adequate to a disruption of this or any other Government is that of revolution. Revolution is the highest law among men, because it is the law of force—of the inevitable. It makes and unmakes nations; it is the sanction of all Governments. It is perfectly legitimate, because it is an appeal to that ultimate power of a State, of which the State itself is but the organ and representative. The success of the appeal proves the validity of the result, because it expresses elementary force. Accordingly, a revolution accomplished is recognized by publicists as settling all questions of authority or jurisdiction. Now, the war which has come in between the North and South for the past two years has made a revolution. It has substituted in the South another Government for that of the Union. This is the fact, and the fact in such a matter is the important thing. It settles the law. No technicality in a question of this kind can stand. The war has utterly dissolved the connection between the North and South, and rendered them separate and independent Powers in the world. This is the necessary legal effect of civil war anywhere. It makes the belligerent parties independent for the time being, and, unless the one succumbs to the other, they continue independent of each other forever.

The principle is laid down by Vattel as follows :

"When a nation becomes divided into two parties, absolutely independent, and no longer acknowledging a common superior, the State is dissolved, and the war between the two parties stands upon the same ground, in every respect, as a public war between two different nations."—*Book III, chap. 17, c. 428.*

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that so learned and profound a jurist as the honorable member from Pennsylvania [Mr. STEVENS] should express the same opinion.

A belligerent Power is an independent State for belligerent purposes, or purposes of war; and being an independent State is no part of any other State. The South has not, therefore, been any part of this Union since first it became a military power, and set its formidable armies in the field to approve its right to continue a nation. There are three steps to be taken by any body of people proceeding from a state of dependence to one of independence in their public relations. These three steps are: first, insurrection, which implies no national development, but only the preliminary unsettling of the old order. This may be put down by reading the riot act, and invoking the *posse comitatus*. Second, belligerency, which implies a complete military organization, and such civil functions as may be necessary to a nation in time of war. During this stage, a people are as entirely independent as they can ever be. But the question of their independence is in dispute. They may maintain it, or not; but for the time it is an indubitable fact. They at once assume their proper place in the world, and rank with nations of the oldest date. Their intercourse with all mankind, including those with whom they are at war, is such as nations hold—an intercourse regulated only by that high code known as the law of nations. The third and last form of this progressive development is that of absolute nationality, when the war is at an end. The question is settled. The national existence is no longer disputed, because its power *to be* is vindicated and established. It then becomes a nation for peace, as it was before a nation for war, and this simply because it necessarily falls into a state of peace, since war is no longer its business.

The *fait accompli* of the diplomats, it is true, signifies that period at which absolute and undisputed nationality is achieved by the determination of war in favor of the new belligerent; nevertheless, the fact of revolution and a new order is indubitable and undeniable from the moment insurrection crystallizes into a military and civil organization, and the rights and responsibilities of the parties are defined and regulated by the law of nations instead of the local law.

When, therefore, the South became a belligerent power, and was so recognized and treated by all the world, including ourselves, it necessarily lost its place in the Union and became a separate body. It could not perform a double *role* among the nations; it was a physical impossibility for it to exist in two forms. It could not be in part the American Union, and at the same time be the confederate States of America. As it was acknowledged the latter it was necessarily denied the former character. In securing the position of a belligerent power the South therefore accomplished a revolution, and was turned over under the law of nations to its own individual direction and destiny.

The application of the law of nations to the circumstances of the case determines the fact, and leaves us no alternative. The law of nations is part of our own Constitution. It is a part of every nation's constitution. It is the law of each and of all, and the law of all because the law of each.

The sovereign act which, in adopting the Constitution, created the people of these States a nation, simultaneously constituted the law of nations *their* law. It is our own Constitution, therefore, which makes the revolution the effect of civil war, affixes the character of nationality to the consequence of revolution, and puts the seceded States out of constitutional relations with the Union. Consequently, it is impossible for us to act on the assumption that these States

are in the Union without violating the very Constitution which we profess so much to respect.

Mr. MAYNARD. The gentleman has referred to a remark I made when I moved to lay on the table certain resolutions introduced by him some weeks since, and which were laid on the table with remarkable unanimity. The gentleman did not understand my remarks, or he would not have represented me as saying that the Union would be or could be dissolved by any resolution of this House; or that the southern confederacy could be established in that way. That was not the purport of my statement. As I recollect the remark, it was that that was the first occasion in this House of formal action proposed which recognized the Union as dissolved, and recognized a southern confederacy—recognized it as a fact existing; a fact which I then denied, and which I still deny, although it may be more than Bourbon stupidity so to regard it. Treason has not yet dissolved the Union, and, God willing, it shall never do so.

Mr. CONWAY. I know the honorable member from Tennessee has a different theory. The people of the border States, from motives which are apparent, and which I will not question, have throughout insisted that the Union was incapable of infraction, and that no earthly power could divest the slaveholders of their constitutional rights.

The President has adopted this idea, and done his best to impress it upon the public mind as the inexorable law of the case. His object was to develop a Union party in the South which should support his administration. He wanted a base of operations for a pro-slavery Republican party, after the manner of the Democracy. He repelled the idea of northern nationality as suggesting a "remorseless revolutionary struggle," and sought to restore southern nationality on his own platform and under his own leadership.

Even as late as last November Federal officers were still permitted to issue such official orders as this of General Boyle, in Kentucky:

"All commanding officers serving in this district are ordered not to permit any negroes or slaves to enter the camps; and all officers or privates are forbid to interfere or intermeddle with the slaves in any way."

Well may the London Spectator remark, that "this is one of those innumerable little facts that show us that statesmanship does not exist at the North."

This is the reason the war is a failure. The President has disowned the revolution. He has perverted the war, as far as possible, to defeat it and restore the old system. In spite of inevitable results, he clings with insane tenacity to the idea that the old Union still lives; and endeavors to fill the Halls of Congress and all the Departments of Government with the representation of the slave power.

As I stated at the outset, he has not made war in any singleness of purpose to effect the object of a war, to wit, conquest. But he has employed the armies of the nation as auxiliary in a scheme of political proselytism. He has held up the physical power of the nation *in terrorem* over the rebellious slaveholders, seeking only to induce them to return to their allegiance. In all Departments of the Government, civil and military, but especially in the military, his chief appointments were made to effect this object. With Seward in the Cabinet, with McClellan on the Potomac, and Buell in the West, with the mass of subordinate officials to correspond, an effectual check was insured to any action so precipitous as to defeat his exclusive and paramount end. The superior resources and power of the North, and its entire ability to overcome the South do not, in my mind, admit of a question. The difficulty has not been in our want of means, but in the manner of their use. All our strength has been required to pass through executive hands to reach its point of attack, and in so doing has been frittered away and brought to naught. This is the secret of our failure.

In forming a judgment at the outset of the probable result of the war, our mistake was in not giving sufficient attention to the character of our chief Executive Magistrate. We surveyed our immense superiority in the mere material of war, and triumphantly jumped to the conclusion that we should at once prove irresistible. We forgot that, notwithstanding our merits or capacities, the issue turned upon a single pivot.

Mr. Lincoln is evidently not the man for this occasion. There is not in America at this time a solid foundation for anything not based on the idea of North or South, and Mr. Lincoln stands on neither the one nor the other. I say this out of no ill will to him. He cannot help himself. His system is deficient. The revolution which he is required to conduct is contrary to the laws which govern him—to his whole organization, his physical and moral constitution, his training, his process of thought, his temperament. He cannot comprehend or appreciate it. He is not a northern man in any sense; neither by birth, education, political or personal sympathies, or by any belief in the superiority of northern civilization, or its right to rule this continent. The idea of northern nationality and dominion is hateful to him. He calls it radical abolitionism, seeking to inaugurate “a remorseless revolutionary struggle.” Mr. Lincoln is a politician of a past age. He belongs to the old Whig party, and will never belong to any other. He is anti-slavery, but of a genial southern type. His emancipation is that of Henry Clay, and will never be sincerely any other. It is of a gradual and “compensatory” character. All this was, of course, well enough in its day and generation. And so was Mr. Lincoln. But we are now in a new world; and all such politicians as he are a hinderance and a calamity.

But the effect of this war in the hands of Mr. Lincoln is not alone to restore the Union on the terms of the Constitution as it is; but, if this cannot be accomplished, to amend the Constitution in a manner to satisfy the slaveholders, and make the Constitution so amended the basis of a settlement. The conciliation by which the Democrats are willing to purchase a reunion goes to the full extent of securing to the South, by constitutional provision, the principle, in some form, of a negative or veto power on the action of the Government. “Settle the Union,” says the honorable member from Ohio, [Mr. VALLANDIGHAM,] “on the original basis of the Constitution, *and give to each section the power to protect itself within the Union*, and now, after the terrible lesson of the past two years, the Union will be stronger than before, and, indeed, endure for ages.

This is the most alarming feature of the case. The particular form of compromise, however, is not the important matter. The tendency of the war is to keep the issue of this great struggle in suspense, and throw it for final decision into the hands of political leaders in the next election.

It is not to be denied that the dominion of the American continent is the fundamental idea of the American system. It has been at the foundation of our political existence from the beginning. It is an idea lodged at the bottom of the mind of every American whether he knows it or not, and it cannot be eradicated. Ours is a Union of States, calculated to embrace all American communities in one grand circle. The principle laid down by President Monroe, that no European Power should establish or uphold any nationality on this continent without our consent, proceeds on the same idea. We are the American people, and must control the American continent. But the question of slavery has interposed itself between the Union and a portion of the States and broken them off, and we are now struggling to restore them.

There are three methods of again uniting the nation: one is, to crush out the slaveholders by force; the other, to surrender to them on the matter in issue; and the third is temporary separation and final reunion on an anti-slavery basis. There is a party in the country in favor of each of these methods. The Re-

publican party are for force; the Democratic for conciliation. The Republican party consists of those who are opposed, in principle, to slavery; the Democratic, to those who are not. They are equally, however, for restoring the integrity of the nation. Indeed, the instinct of union and territorial empire is so dominant that the party of conciliation would adopt force, or the party of force, conciliation, rather than give up the effort for dominion.

The President was elected by the Republicans, and seems to be their representative. His course, however, has not been such as to promote their end. When he came into power the expectation and logical inference was, that the slaveholders would be crushed out. The tendency among the Democrats was then to temporary separation. But since that time things have undergone a change. The Executive has not made war upon the South in any proper sense, and the South has not been crushed out. But, on the contrary, it has boldly held its own; and the prospect of its speedy extinction is not now very brilliant; consequently the Democrats have turned round. They think the Union may yet be restored through conciliation and compromise. They are not now in favor of any separation, not for an hour. How emphatically the honorable member from Ohio answered the question put by himself, "shall we separate? No! No! No!" The President has played into the hands of these gentlemen most completely; and his proposition that the Union is indivisible, and that the war must be waged only to restore the constitutional relations between the Government and the people of the revolted States, is entirely in their interest. He has held the issue open. It is now evident that force, as a controlling element in the strife, has spent itself; and that either conciliation or temporary separation must settle the dispute. The Democrats will not, of course, listen to separation for an instant. Such a suggestion in their eyes, now, is treason—a proposition to dissolve the Union—for which one ought to be hanged. They expect the question whether the Union shall be restored by force or compromise to be submitted to the people in the next election; and upon that to carry the country. Their plan is to oppose the Administration simply on its anti-slavery policy. They put in issue the confiscation act, the Missouri emancipation act, and the President's proclamation of emancipation. These measures they pronounce unconstitutional, deny their validity, and that of everything done or to be done in pursuance of them. In addition to this, they attack the Administration on account of its suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, false imprisonment, corruption, imbecility, &c., and a thousand other incidents. But on the war and the integrity of the Union, they are like adamant itself. They claim to favor the war for the sake of the Union, but to be for compromise rather than war. They say very truthfully that the Republicans have tried force for two years, and exhausted the country, and upon this claim the adoption of their method as all that is left to be done. This is the manner in which the politicians of the country propose to terminate this great conflict.

It is true that the honorable member from Ohio [Mr. VALLANDIGHAM] suggests an armistice at the present time; but I do not see that, in this respect, he concurs with the rest of his party. I need only refer to the position of the gentleman's colleague, [Mr. Cox,] and also to that of the recently inaugurated Governor Seymour, of New York; likewise that of the honorable member from Pennsylvania, [Mr. WRIGHT,] whose impassioned speech the other day in favor of the war attracted such signal attention; and also to the utterances of the various Democratic newspapers, and the several recent Democratic conventions and mass meetings in different parts of the country. But even the object of the proposed armistice is not to end the war, but only to suspend it. It is to have peace, and at the same time to preserve the technical constitutional Union preliminary to a settlement based on compromise.

An alliance seems recently to have been effected to this end between certain elements heretofore hostile. The border State politicians are the remnant of

the old Whig and Know-Nothing parties, who, all their lives, cherished an intense hatred of the Democracy. They now unite with that party to effect this object. The Republicans of the Albany school, under the sagacious leadership of Mr. Weed, who, for long years, fought the Van Buren re-gency and finally broke it down through the agency of free-soil, are also hand in glove with their old opponents. Thus the army of the Democracy takes the field for the next great political battle, supported on the left by the followers of Clay and Crittenden, and on the right by the special friends of William H. Seward. Such a host may well feel confident. It is a combination for victory. The elements have been well shaped. Not in vain have the border State politicians thronged the halls of the Presidential Mansion. Not in vain has the discreet Secretary of State incurred the reputation of having become imbecile. Not in vain has the whole Administration suffered the odium of drifting with the tide for lack of a policy. They could well afford to dispense with the applause of the radicals, while they silently directed that under current which was to refer the gigantic question with which they would not grapple, to the decision of another presidential election.

The chief element in the accomplishment of this reactionary movement is the war which the Administration is conducting for the restoration of the Union. The war is indeed the trump card of the Democracy; not war for emancipation; not war for conquest; but Mr. Lincoln's war for the Union. They have no fear that it will serve the end of abolition. It has passed that stage. Its results are now in their keeping. All they wish is its prolongation. In the first place, it holds the nation pledged to the principle that the Union is intact, and the Constitution open to amendment through southern votes. In the next place, the responsibility of it being with the Republicans, it weakens them sadly in the election. And in the third place, its effect is to wear away and depress the slaveholders, and dispose them in favor of conciliation. The war in whatever aspect it may be presented, is an admirable instrument for them. If it should happen to meet with unexpected success, and defeat the rebellion, the slaveholders will be brought back just in time to join them in the election. If it should lag and accomplish no results, as now seems likely, this will inevitably insure them a triumph in the popular vote. Their theory is—and it is a sound one—that the two forces, abolition and secession, now in deadly conflict have only to be permitted to continue the fight long enough to wear each other out, and cause the political waters to subside to their former level.

Thus, on the basis of the war, they have a complete mastery of the situation, and no earthly power can prevent their success.

Nevertheless, without reference to the result of the war, I consider their chance in the election far superior to that of the party of the Administration. Great reliance is placed by the latter on the vote of the soldiers. But, in my opinion, this is delusive. The soldier will be affected in like manner with the rest of the people; and, moreover, will be tired of military service and anxious to return home. They will be dissatisfied from a thousand causes and desire a change. The suffering and indignation yet to be engendered by the unlimited issue of an irredeemable paper currency will of itself overwhelm the Administration party and sink it deeper than plummet ever sounded. But the Democrats, in my judgment, safely calculate that they can take issue on any one of a hundred necessary incidents of the war, and defeat their opponents by a large majority.

Such an event would, of course, involve a reversal of all that has been done in the interest of freedom. But its crowning result would be a convention to amend the Constitution as already suggested. Thus, after four years of war vouchsafed to us by Providence, as an opportunity of deliverance from the domination of slavery, we will return to our thralldom on terms more irrevocable and oppressive than ever existed before.

We treat with supreme contempt the proposition of amending the Constitution in a manner to leave the New England States to themselves. But I have no doubt whatever that if the South should make this an indispensable condition of reunion, it would be promptly agreed to by this reactionary party. It requires a vote of three-fourths to amend the Constitution at all; but if this can be obtained for one form of compromise, I see not why it may not be for another. If it may be had for legalizing slavery throughout the nation, why may it not be for cutting off offensive members, and adapting the nation to that condition? Counting the fifteen slave States, it is highly probable that the requisite vote may be secured for "compromise" in the very worst form in which it can be presented.

But the simple Republicans seem to imagine that the game is still in their hands. They scout the idea that the next election is to have anything to do with it, and profess to think it all settled by the President's proclamation of emancipation and their other anti-slavery measures. They seem to be sure that the whole South will be turned inside out and rebuilt upon new foundations before the next election; that our armies will advance victoriously into the enemy's country, capture Richmond, sweep through the Mississippi valley to its mouth, take Charleston, Mobile, Savannah, and other strongholds, set the slaves free, confiscate the lands, and settle the whole difficulty in the most radical manner. They have already introduced bills into this House, to establish a bureau of emancipation and for parceling out the confiscated lands of slaveholders. But, for my part, I do not see any signs whatever of this swift consummation. I have been waiting two years for something like it, but it seems further off now than ever. The President, in my opinion, is a guarantee against any such result.

But those who cherish this brilliant prospect entirely overlook, among other important matters, the tolerably important fact that the war is to restore the Union, and that should the national arms be successful, and the Southern confederacy fall to pieces to-morrow, the slaveholders would at once throw away their secession insignia, and rally around the flag of our Union. This would be the end of the war, and also the end of the Republicans. The slaveholders would be at last convinced of their error, and would gratify the heart of our amiable President by accepting his invitation, and returning to their allegiance. They would assume the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution. Mr. Lincoln would become their President, instead of Mr. Davis, and would be required to sustain them in their constitutional rights, which, of course, he would do, as in duty bound, and they, in return, would sustain him. They would, of course, repudiate all their former leaders, who might be hanged for the matter of that; it would not affect the vital point with them, to wit, slavery, on which they would be more alive, more sensitive, more jealous, more determined and solid, than ever before. Their defeat in the field rendering them timid and fearful, their cohesion would be in proportion to their alarm. Their tendency to unity would be like the spring of a steel trap. From an irresistible instinct, every slaveholder in the land would grapple himself with multiplied hooks to every other. So that in a speedy and triumphal conclusion of the war, the Republicans have no grain of comfort. It is early, inevitable overthrow to them. Such a result would fill these Halls with a class of men who would sweep the confiscation and emancipation acts from the statute-books with wild shrieks of execration.

Many suppose that the effect of the proclamation of emancipation will be so thoroughly, speedily, and completely annihilate slavery that the slaveholders will have no longer a motive to act together. This is an egregious mistake. The proclamation will have no such effect. It cannot have any such effect. Its constitutionality is denied. It is still unexecuted, and its validity undetermined. The whole subject is yet open to debate and

final settlement. The judiciary department is to render its decision upon it; and, in the meantime, it is to be the controlling issue in a popular election for President. This state of things will undoubtedly inspire the slaveholders with a more resolute purpose than ever. Their effort will not, as heretofore, be to prevent the abolitionist from freeing the slave, as a distant and speculative proposition, but to rescue him from the grasp of the enemy already actually laid upon him. It will redouble their will, and bring out every latent energy.

But it is thought that Congress might take the ground that the seceded States had committed suicide, and were not States at all, but Territories, and had no right to resume constitutional relations with the Union. This would, of course, be a violation of the object of the war, and is not to be presumed. This object has been declared over and over again by the executive department. It has been set forth in every message of the President to Congress, from the first to the last, inclusive; in divers of his proclamations and orders, particularly in his last great proclamation of emancipation; in the reports and correspondence of his Secretaries; and also by the two Houses of Congress in formal resolves. It has been officially communicated, through the Secretary of State, to all the courts of Europe; and has been made known to the rebels themselves. It therefore stands in the nature of a formal pledge to all mankind. It will not probably be changed. A proposition to declare the seceded States politically outside, but territorially inside, of the Union, was brought forward in the Senate last winter, under the high sanction of the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, [Mr. SUMNER,] but was not favorably entertained, for the very reason that it implied an infraction of the principle upon which the war was being waged. The same suggestion has been repeatedly made in this House, in various forms, by the honorable chairman of the Committee on Territories, [Mr. ASHLEY,] with no better success.

But even if this expedient should be resorted to by the Republicans, it would only be a temporary effect, as this, with all other questions involved, would be submitted to the issue of the election. But it would also, in the meantime, have been reversed by the Congress which will come into existence after the 4th of March next.

I cannot, therefore, see how this war can go on without producing consequences the most injurious and melancholy to the nation.

Yet, if the President should enact an immediate and radical reform, should proclaim a different principle and purpose, and follow it up by concentrated and powerful attacks upon the enemy, the present tendency might be counteracted, and the event, after all, be good. But of this there is no probability.

It is thus evident that all the forces of the country—civil, military, political, diplomatic, and other—have been manipulated in a way to defeat the legitimate result of this great progressive movement of the North. The Administration has seemed to endeavor first to restore the Union on the terms of the Constitution as it is; and, failing in this, to so dispose the elements as to insure the ascendancy of a Democratic fusion party in the next election, maintaining the question undetermined long enough to be able to deliver it over to the new Administration for settlement on the basis of compromise; thus making the power of the slaveholders in the nation and over the continent supreme and permanent.

I attach no blame to the person who fills the executive office; I only deplore the fate which has afflicted us with the wrong man in that place at this momentous period. We are told of a philosopher who undertook to demonstrate the inevitability of the Reformation in a few statistics about Luther's family and early surroundings. He collected certain geographical and other facts, such as the kind of soil, climate, and productions of his birthplace; the kind of people among whom the great reformer was brought up; the character of his parents and associates; and thus formed the basis of a philosophical

analysis, resolving Luther into an invincible law from the operation of which the Reformation must necessarily ensue. I should think that such an analysis of Mr. Lincoln would show him to be utterly incapable of anything else than just what he has performed. He has been an instrument. The transition of great bodies through the progress of ideas, does not take place by rapid and unbroken marches. Its advance is slow and by degrees. At the time Mr. Lincoln was elected President, the nation had not yet been delivered. The North had just realized its identity, but had not become independent. The old system had just begun to give way and let in the new. Mr. Lincoln was the legitimate representative of that indefinite and uncertain period. The South had seceded; but the North had not entered. A vision of the Union hovered over the land, and dwelt in the minds of men. Mr. Lincoln was neither northern or southern, but an embodiment of that shadow, which, rising up from the expiring form of the old order, lingered over its remains, reluctant to depart.

I am sure that no other person than Mr. Lincoln, or some one of the same mold, could have been elected President at that time. The nation, though not southern as before, was yet not fully northern, and the southern element was a necessary ingredient in the character of the President. The reason Mr. Seward was not chosen instead of Mr. Lincoln is that the former was the representative of the North in its absolute character, and that character had not yet been fully developed. Mr. Seward was defeated, but not by the North. He was defeated by the southern connection. Let him not now endeavor to strangle the North. He was a worthy, an illustrious exponent of that movement which was the germ of a new nationality; and had his splendid genius been given to its service in the hour of its birth, as it ought to have been, gratefully would it now hail him its deliverer and benefactor, and proudly would it crown him with its highest honors.

It does not become me to say what should be done by the Representatives of the people to secure the nation from such a calamity as this presages. I have no policy to propound; no measure to advance. My service in the public councils will expire with this short session of Congress. I am not, for the future, one of the accredited agents of the North, upon whom properly devolves this responsibility. I do not, therefore, put myself forward as its guide.

There are others in these Halls better fitted in this juncture to propose the measure it would become us to adopt. I defer to them.

The Senator from Massachusetts [MR. SUMNER] who has lately been re-elected to serve another term of six years in the body he has so long adorned, should, in this crisis, point us to the proper action. His purely northern character, his great abilities, his lofty aspirations, his sacrifices for freedom, the entire confidence of his State, so spontaneously bestowed upon him—and that State the noblest in America—all single him out as one authorized and required to speak with a decisive voice on this great occasion.

There are also in this House gentlemen whose words on this momentous theme the country will listen to with intense interest. The honorable member from Pennsylvania, [MR. THADDEUS STEVENS,] one of the truly great men of America—full of learning and wisdom—tried by long years of arduous service in this cause, who has never faltered, and is now re-elected in his district by overwhelming numbers, stands foremost among those of whom the nation will expect deliverance from the dangers which encompass it.

Let these men, and such as these, speak, and tell the country what to do in this hour of transcendent peril.

Nevertheless, I cannot refrain from expressing my individual opinion that the true policy of the North is to terminate this war at once. The longer it continues, the worse our situation becomes. Let the two Houses of Congress adopt the following resolutions:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives, &c., That the Executive be, and he is hereby, requested to issue a general order to all commanders of forces in the several military departments of the United States to discontinue offensive operations against the enemy, and to act for the future entirely on the defensive.

Resolved, That the Executive be, and he is hereby, further requested to enter into negotiations with the authorities of the confederate States with reference to a cessation of hostilities, based on the following propositions: 1. Recognition of the independence of the confederate States. 2. A uniform system of duties upon imports. 3. Free trade between the two States. 4. Free navigation of the Mississippi river. 5. Mutual adoption of the Monroe doctrine.

I am aware that this may be said to be giving up the contest. In one respect it undoubtedly is. It is an abandonment, for the time being, of the attempt to bring the South under the sway of the Union by force of arms. But it cannot be denied that in this object we are already defeated; we have defeated ourselves. But it also protects us from the insidious designs of domestic foes, now plotting within our own bosom. This action would, of course, imply a distinct political jurisdiction between the North and South. But that is now an existing fact.

I entirely disagree with those who assert that this is impossible, because there are no natural boundaries between the two, such as the Rocky mountains or the Atlantic ocean. This is a bugbear with which we impose upon ourselves. The people of the North and South can never become *foreign nations* to each other, in the sense in which the French and English or Russian are. They are sprung from the same origin, speak the same language, possess a common literature, inherit similar political and religious views, and inhabit regions closely connected by natural and artificial ties. They will therefore, both be always *American*. The only great difference between them is a social and political nature, namely, that which arises from the existence of African slavery in one, and the absence of it in the other.

This fact, however, offers no obstacle whatever to such a separation as is involved in independent political jurisdictions; on the contrary, it greatly facilitates it.

Before the Federal Union was established all the States were independent, and associated under Articles of Confederation in the nature of a treaty. The arguments now adduced to show the impracticability of present separation between North and South, go with equal force to prove the impossibility of what then actually existed and was accepted in the case of the thirteen original States of the Union. The latter stood toward each other precisely as the North and South would stand should they stop the war and enter into treaty. It would simply be resolving the North and South into confederate States, resuming, as to them, the old basis of the Confederation. This would be the whole of it. It is, therefore, a very simple operation.

I do not suggest this however, on the idea that should it ever be adopted the separation it implies would be permanent. I believe that it would insure an ultimate reunion on an anti-slavery basis.

I have confidence in the inherent vitality of northern civilization. I have no fears to set it in competition with that of the South. Let them proceed side by side in the race of empire, and we shall see which will triumph.

The South has no coherence; no solid basis. It is built upon a foundation of sand. The principle of secession is one of disintegration. Its system is unstable from foundation to turret. Slavery will inevitably rend it asunder. This of all things is the most potent cause of disunion. It develops a perpetual warfare between conscience and interest. Wherever the former outweighs the latter, separation begins. Let the South become independent, and we shall one of these days see a "North" and "South" in the South. The irrepressible conflict will be transferred to the other side of Mason and Dixon's. Anti-slavery will break out in Richmond. The doctrines of Jefferson, Mason, and

Madison will again be spoken. The eloquent voice of some southern Phillips or Beecher will be heard denouncing the evil that blights the land.

I cannot doubt that the States of the confederacy along the northern line will speedily become free, and eager to reunite with the North. Such slaves as can escape across the line will do so, and the rest will be conveyed by their owners to the distant South; and as these States become free, they will become antagonistic to their confederates and reconciled to the old Union, and no obstacle can prevent their return.

Thus the southern line of the United States will be brought down to the next tier of slave States, upon which the same effect will be wrought; and so the process continued, until the national ensign again floats unchallenged on the breezes of the Gulf.

In the mean time, we will conquer our domestic enemy. We will be no longer endangered with a resumption of slaveholding supremacy through the forms of the Union. The effect of Democratic triumph will be comparatively harmless. The power of the slaveholders in the Government being gone, that wretched spawn of our previous politics known as the *doughface* will also be departed forever. The Democrats, heretofore the most ready, for the sake of power, to do the bidding of the South, would, now that the South scorned their alliance, be the most hostile and determined against it. Separation would set the Democracy of the free States and the slaveholders of the South in opposition, and it is the only thing that ever will. The Democrats would change their base of operations. They would, as usual, look to the source of power.

There are many philanthropic persons, however, who deprecate separation on the ground of its infidelity to the slave. But if separation be the best means, under the circumstances, of promoting the cause of freedom, how can it be infidelity to the slave? The stronger the claim of the slave upon us, the more firmly are we bound to that measure which will enable us to continue effectively our efforts in his behalf. A resumption of the Union by the slaveholders in the manner I have described would set on the slave a doom of eternal despair. If I were myself a fugitive bondman seeking security and cherishing the hope of ultimately redeeming wife, children, home, country, and friends, I should implore the nation with all my heart and soul to pause in its present career.

The Republicans depend on force—now or never; the Democrats rely on conciliation and compromise.

I put these suggestions forward in behalf of freedom and the North. I presume I shall have no second for them in this House. But I do not doubt they will find approval in the hearts of millions of sincere and devoted men and women throughout the country, and in the unerring judgment of the future.

I have thus endeavored to set forth the cause of our defeat in this war, and the dangers which now impend over us, and to glance at the means by which we may mitigate the former and avert the latter. I have done this from an earnest sense of public duty, and am now content to rest, and await developments. I am no party politician. I am an anti-slavery man. I have no other politics.

In taking ground against the further prosecution of this war, I am, therefore, acting in the interest of Freedom, and to no other intent or purpose whatever. I believe with all the intensity of the profoundest conviction that Freedom in America demands a cessation of hostilities and formal recognition of the independence of the Confederate States. In this I may be mistaken; but until I am convinced of my error I shall pursue this one object without disguise, reserve, or qualification.

“Better to dwell in Freedom’s Hall
With a cold damp floor and mouldering wall,
Than bow the head and bend the knee
In the proudest palace of slavery.”





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March-April 1989
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